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RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 5989
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2262
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 001000

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ANSAR AL-ISLAM IN THE MUSLIM SAHARA: NEW TERRORIST
KID PLAYING IN THE MAGHREB SANDBOX?

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Our Algerian contacts are withholding their final judgment about a new, little-known terrorist group that calls itself Ansar al-Islam in the Muslim Sahara (AIMS). The group publicly professed its allegiance to Algeria's premier terrorist group, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), on July 1 via an internet website. While claiming AQIM allegiance, AIMS's announcement focused mainly on fighting the Moroccan government. Its subsequent message then focused on Maghreb-wide targets and the extinction of the Jews. Changing focus again, AIMS's newly launched website presents anti-American videos that tug at the core of Islamic values and target those willing to fight "apostates" in Iraq. Although AIMS pledged devotion to AQIM leader Droukdal, AQIM has not made any public acknowledgement of the group. It is unclear whether AIMS is merely jumping on the al-Qaeda bandwagon to seek increased funding and fame, or if it is a machination of regional intelligence services. The website's mixed messaging and shoddy production quality have our contacts leaning towards the latter. END SUMMARY.

Allegiance to AQIM or Moroccan Jihadists?

¶2. (C) On July 1 AIMS, an alleged North African jihadist group connected to the Western Sahara, published on its website www.sahara.6te.net (and also on closed membership website www.alhesbah.org) a statement of its allegiance to AQIM and its leader, Abdelmalek Droukdal. Narrating, an unnamed spokesman called for an AQIM victory against all common enemies -- the Moroccan government, agents of the French, crusaders, and (rather uniquely) the Polisario Front. The spokesman warned Muslims to stay away from government buildings and military installations to avoid the spilling of Muslim blood. He also vowed that AIMS would not be limited to the Muslim desert. Contrary to press reports that claimed the AIMS spokesman was Mauritanian, native Arabic-speaking Embassy employees concurred on July 2 that he spoke with a heavy Moroccan accent.

AIMS WEBSITE - www.sahara.6te.net

¶3. (U) The AIMS website displays 9 sections of which "Newsflash" and "Pictures" are the most inflammatory, playing on Muslims' sense of honor and anti-American

sentiment. Our contacts question the website's authenticity, pointing out inconsistencies in messaging, dissemination and production. Some examples follow.

Mixed Messaging?

¶4. (C) Curiously, the July 1 announcement was immediately followed by a mixed message on July 2 in which the spokesman called for support and unity in the Ummah and urged courage against conspiracies orchestrated by Jews and crusaders. The majority of the 25-minute message consisted of rambling Qur'anic verse. Six minutes were dedicated to images of President Bush meeting with Moroccan King Mohammed VI, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Tunisian President Ben Ali and Libya's Mu'ammarr Qadhafi -- all against a backdrop of burning flames. Echourouk el-Youmi editor Anis Rahmani (protect) told PolOffs July 8 that AIMS' inconsistent messaging raised immediate suspicion. Since the initial announcement was geared toward fighting the Moroccan government, Rahmani surmised that the Moroccan intelligence services had created it.

¶5. (C) Rahmani asserted that the AIMS website is less sophisticated than AQIM's and al-Qaeda's websites, which are more consistent in production and messaging. He claimed that AQIM's website design is outsourced to Europe, where there is an abundance of expertise. Lacking action videos, the AIMS website is full of still photos set to jihadi music and commentary. AIMS's website does provide links to al-Qaeda's website, offering access to high production videos on fighting in Iraq. However, a cross-check of al-Qaeda and AQIM websites indicated that neither group has publicly acknowledged AIMS. (Comment: In

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addition, the AIMS website is not linked to al-Fajr Media Center (www.w-n-n.com), which appears to be al-Qaeda's official internet dissemination conduit for al-Qaeda and its affiliates (like AQIM). End Comment).

Call to Join the Fight in Iraq

¶6. (U) A video segment dated December 17, 2004, shows a woman wearing a brightly-flowered abaya and white headscarf behind bars. It starts with a message from then al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab az-Zarqawi. A woman then narrates the story of Fatima, who claimed to be incarcerated at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. She recounts the abuse suffered at the hands of her occupiers. She describes being raped nine times by apostates, and repeats that "her belly is full of the babies of pigs and monkeys." The narrator reminds you that Fatima is a Muslim sister and pleads for her Muslim brothers to come to Iraq and kill her along with the apostates. She goes on to describe that 13 under-aged, unmarried girls at the prison have been raped in front of others, then left naked. Another woman in a black headscarf behind bars is shown. (Note: The woman's hands are pristine with manicured nails. End Note.) The narrator continues with a tale of a soldier who tortured a girl to the point that she lost consciousness. Even though suicide is forbidden in Islam, the narrator claims that the girl killed herself because she could not accept living as a sinner.

¶7. (C) The next section of Newsflash displays 16 pictures of American soldiers degrading Muslims in Iraq by conducting searches of young girls in their homes, pushing a covered woman, handcuffing young children in their rooms, searching older women on the street, arresting a teenage boy face down on the floor, and a child who is a double amputee and burned. In addition, there are 8 pictures of American soldiers who are amputees. Liberte journalist Mounir Boudjema pointed out on July 3 that most of the website is a quick download from other sources, none of it newly generated. Those sections that would be attributable to AIMS are under construction ("Programs", "Who We Are",

"Jihad Leaders", and "An Honored Conversation"), providing no information on the organization or its creators.

Static Areas

¶18. (U) Rahmani told PolOffs July 8 that the static areas of the website are simplistic in their construction. It includes a "Qur'an" section that links audio recitals by Sheikh Saoud al-Sharim, Sheikh Saad al-Ghamoudi, Sheikh Al-Ayoun al-Kouchi, Sheikh Sadiq al-Minchoui and Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohamed al-Matroud. The "Lectures" section links to jihadi lectures by Sheikh Hafith bin Ajab al-Dusri. There is a "Communiqués from Terrorist Organizations" section that links to several al-Qaeda videos on Iraq. The "Fatwa of the Week" section states that "All Muslims should help their weak brothers as much as they can."

Low Readership?

¶19. (U) The AIMS website has two interactive sections, "Contact Us" and "Guestbook." In the first ten days following its launch, the "Guestbook" section received only 5 blogger responses. The website counter itself is also under construction.

Looking for a Sponsor?

¶10. (C) The "Ideology" section boasts about AIMS' vast experience, but claims it needs a sponsor to implement a program to revive the nation, save people from darkness and lead them into the light. On July 3, Liberte reporter Boudjema asserted to PolOffs that this plea for leadership appears to be a DRS (Algerian military intelligence service) invention to lure AQIM members out into the open. By contrast, Rahmani argued to us on July 8 that the website appeared to be a trap set by the Moroccan intelligence services working to snag AQIM members.

¶11. (C) Boudjema told PolOff July 3 that he became highly

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suspicious of the AIMS website because of the timing of the launch and the mixed messaging it presented. Noted terrorism expert and London-based al-Hayah journalist Camille Tawil told PolOff on July 5 that the website's lack of specific information about its leaders, program and location was suspect and that "only people inside the government know what is really going on." Al-Bilad journalist Faycal Oukaci, who also covers the Algeria terrorism beat, told PolOffs on July 9 that he gave no credence to the AIMS website, arguing that it could be "two kids with access to a computer sitting in a cybercafé in Nouakchott." He opined that the majority of press reports concerning AQIM arrests and GOA military operations are manufactured by the DRS.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: AIMS's allegiance to AQIM initially drew attention in the Algerian press as our contacts studied the announcements. Its website's "Newsflash" and "Pictures" sections evoke a deep hatred of the U.S. and at the same time serve as an effective recruitment tool for al-Qaeda in Iraq. Our contacts noted that the FBI told the Moroccan media on July 4 that AIMS is situated in southwest Mauritania. Here in Algeria, however, the best reporters on Islamist terrorism do not agree that AIMS even exists and/or where it may be situated.

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